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Review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests

Report of the Secretary-General

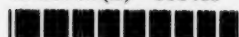
Summary

By its resolution 2000/35 of 18 October 2000, the Economic and Social Council decided that the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests would be reviewed after five years and that the review should also address the institutional framework of the United Nations Forum on Forests, including its position within the United Nations system.

Prepared in response to Forum resolution 4/4, the present report contains a synthesis of the information provided by member States, by members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF) and by other relevant organizations in their reports on the implementation of the proposals for action of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF)/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) and in their responses to a questionnaire based on the specific criteria for the review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests.

Reports and/or responses to the questionnaire were received from 46 member States, the European Union and 10 other relevant organizations and forest-related processes. In addition, CPF members submitted a joint report and a joint response to the questionnaire.

* E/CN.18/2005/1.



The report consists of two main sections, on the implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action (sect. II) and the analysis of responses to the questionnaire on the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests (sect. III). In the conclusions (sect. IV), it is suggested that, while the original mandate assigned to the international arrangement on forests remains valid, there is a need to strengthen the arrangement. Put forward in section V for discussion by the Forum are suggestions for strengthening the arrangement through changes in working methods, bearing in mind that further options for strengthening are considered in other reports submitted by the Secretary-General to the Forum at its present session.

1. Background

1. By its resolution 2000/35 of 18 October 2000, the Economic and Social Council established the international arrangement on forests. The main objective of the arrangement was to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment in that regard. In order to achieve that objective and to carry out the six principal functions specified in its resolution, the Council decided to establish the United Nations Forum on Forests as one of its subsidiary bodies, and to invite heads of relevant organizations, institutions and instruments to form a Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)¹ to support the work of the Forum. The Council also decided that the international arrangement on forests should facilitate and promote the implementation of the proposals for action put forward by the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF)/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF), that the arrangement would be reviewed after five years and that the review would also address the institutional framework of the Forum, including its position within the United Nations system.

2. At its second session, the Forum, recalling the above-mentioned resolution of the Council, decided, by its resolution 2/3,² that the review of the international arrangement on forests would be carried out in the context of the six principal functions of the arrangement, and identified 21 specific criteria for the assessment of its effectiveness. At its fourth session, the Forum, recalling those previous resolutions, agreed, by its resolution 4/4,³ on a process to facilitate the review. In response, the secretariat of the Forum invited member States, CPF members and other relevant organizations and forest-related processes to submit, on a voluntary basis, reports on the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action and to respond, again on a voluntary basis, to a questionnaire on each of the specific criteria. The Forum secretariat also made available guidelines and a suggested format for the national reports, and a paper providing baseline information relevant to the specific criteria.

3. Reports and/or responses to the questionnaire were received from 46 member States. A number requested that the reports submitted by them to the Forum at previous sessions be regarded as constituting a report to the Forum at its fifth session. Responses to the questionnaire were also received from the European Union, from five major groups and from one forest-related process. In addition, CPF members submitted a joint report and a joint response to the questionnaire, and four CPF members submitted individual reports. The present synthesis report is based on the information provided in the reports and responses received.⁴ The present report takes no account of information relating to countries that did not submit reports or questionnaires.

Number of countries which submitted reports and/or responses to the questionnaire, by region

	<i>Africa</i>	<i>Asia</i>	<i>Eastern Europe</i>	<i>Latin America and the Caribbean</i>	<i>Western Europe and other</i>
Number of countries	10	6	9	4	17

4. The General Assembly, by paragraph 46 of its resolution 57/270 B of 23 June 2003, requested that each functional commission of the Economic and Social Council report to the Council no later than 2005 on the outcome of an examination of its methods of work, in order better to pursue the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits. In responding to this request, the Forum may wish to draw upon the present review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests.

II. Implementation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/ Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action

A. Introduction

5. Some 270 proposals for action were identified by IPF and IFF. In its multi-year programme of work and its plan of action,⁵ the Forum agreed to cluster the proposals according to 16 thematic elements, and to focus on particular elements at its second, third and fourth sessions.⁶ These 16 elements form the structure of the analysis in the present section, which is based on information drawn from reports and, where relevant, responses to the questionnaire.

B. Progress made in implementing the proposals for action, according to the 16 thematic elements

1. Formulation and implementation of national forest programmes

6. Most countries give details of their national forest programmes (or similar frameworks) and explain that the IPF/IFF proposals were taken into account during their development. The benefits of such programmes, in terms of providing a focus for forest policy development and implementation, are widely recognized. In some countries, the programmes are developed at the subnational level because significant forest policy responsibilities have been decentralized. Important current challenges include: (a) the need to ensure cross-sectoral integration with other policies so that national forest programme priorities are reflected in broader national development plans, such as the poverty reduction strategy papers; (b) the need to gain high-level political support for national forest programmes; and (c) the need, especially in developing countries, to secure adequate financing for the implementation of the programmes. It is clear from the reports that national forest programmes (or similar frameworks) have helped to bring stakeholders together in developing a common vision for forests and in identifying priorities for implementation. CPF members explain that they have facilitated national forest programmes in a number of important ways, including through the National Forest Programme Facility and the Programme on Forests (PROFOR).⁷

2. Promoting public participation

7. Action has been taken to promote stakeholder participation at various levels: in policymaking; through the preparation of codes of practice; through local consultation on forest management decisions in respect of publicly owned forests; and through mechanisms, such as certification, that have increased consultations on the management of privately owned forests. It is recognized in many reports that

further efforts are now needed to assist stakeholder groups that have a limited capacity or opportunity to participate. Reference is made to the valuable exchange of experience at the workshop on decentralization in forestry, held in Interlaken, Switzerland, from 27 to 30 April 2004. Participatory processes have also been promoted by CPF members in many parts of the world.

3. Combating deforestation and forest degradation

8. Despite some positive trends, there remains a need for continued action to combat deforestation and forest degradation in many countries. Underlying causes of deforestation are complex and varied. For example, pressures to use forest land for agriculture and grazing and to exploit forest products at an unsustainable level may be rooted in poverty and in some places, owners may face pressures to sell forest land for building development. Measures taken to combat deforestation and forest degradation include the development and implementation of national forest programmes (and similar frameworks), management guidelines, financial encouragement, removal of perverse incentives for deforestation and public information campaigns. Among CPF members, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) is implementing Objective 2000, which provides support to countries with a view to their achieving exports of tropical timber and timber products from sustainably managed forests, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is developing best practice guidelines, where appropriate in collaboration with ITTO. In order to sustain progress in combating deforestation and forest degradation, further efforts are needed to address underlying causes, to improve cross-sectoral coordination with other sectors (such as agriculture) and to strengthen professional and institutional capacity, in particular for law enforcement.

4. Traditional forest-related knowledge

9. Countries provide details of inventories that record traditional knowledge, adding that much (potentially very beneficial) knowledge is still being captured. Some reports provide an explanation of how this knowledge has become incorporated into contemporary scientific approaches to sustainable forest management. In relation to intellectual property rights and/or other protection regimes for traditional forest-related knowledge, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits, stressed in several reports is the importance of the developments taking place within the frameworks of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the World Intellectual Property Organization Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore.

5. Forest-related scientific knowledge

10. The dissemination of scientific knowledge is done by such means as electronic publishing, as well as traditional methods, such as meetings, professional education and training, and the use of printed material. Highlighted in the reports is the continuing importance of collaboration and international cooperation, both to prevent duplication and friction among research institutions and to bring together complementary sources of funding for integrated projects. Several countries, in particular some which face the most difficult challenges in relation to their forests, stress that they lack research capacity. Reports demonstrate a positive approach towards encouraging interaction between the scientific research and policy

processes. They emphasize the importance of ensuring that research is policy-relevant and recognize the complex relationship between scientific output and decision-making. CPF itself has significant research capability, in members such as the Center for International Forestry Research, the World Agroforestry Centre and the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations.

6. Forest health and productivity

11. Action is being taken to monitor the impact of air pollution where it remains a threat to forest health and productivity. Countries are also addressing the serious implications for forest health and productivity of invasive species, pests and diseases; action taken includes international collaboration to reduce the risk of infestations spreading through trade and other transboundary movements. In addition, countries are sharing experience on how best to prevent and fight fires. In its report, CPF states that a global information system is monitoring the impact of insect pest and disease outbreaks on forests.

7. Criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management

12. Most countries report that they are developing or implementing national criteria and indicators within the framework of regional processes. Criteria and indicators are regarded as an important tool for monitoring progress towards sustainable forest management. Their strength lies in their objectivity (which can assist those responsible for making political judgements) and the gradual convergence towards an internationally agreed framework for criteria and indicators. Nearly 150 countries, representing 85 per cent of the world's forests, are participating in the nine regional processes. CPF members have played an active role in supporting these processes and the development of criteria and indicators within countries. There is now a need for the further development of measurable indicators, while taking account of resource constraints and recognizing the technical difficulties of collecting some of the desirable data.

8. Economic, social and cultural aspects of forests

13. The contribution of forest goods and services is often much greater than that revealed by official statistics. This is partly because many important outputs (such as fuelwood) form part of the unrecorded, informal economy, and partly because there are non-market outputs (such as many environmental benefits) that can only be valued indirectly. There is also a considerable variation among countries in regard to the availability and quality of market information on forest products: a number of the least developed countries state that their resources for gathering such data are inadequate. Many countries report action to improve the use of economic and policy instruments to promote sustainable forest management. Where there are extensive areas of public forest, the focus has been on setting concession rents and royalty rates to reflect market prices. Some countries contribute to the costs that private owners incur when managing their forests to produce non-market output (such as nature conservation and recreation) and/or offer incentives to promote afforestation. Explained in a number of reports is how taxation measures are used to encourage sustainable forest management. While the appropriate use of such economic and policy instruments is important, countries also recognize the often crucial impact on forests of other policies and economic pressures (e.g., those relating to trade, agriculture, energy and development of human settlements). Fundamental

challenges for the future are to ensure that society places a proper value on forests (reflecting their non-market, public good outputs, as well as financial returns) and that wider national development policies take full account of the potential contribution of forests.

14. Action to promote the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilization of forest genetic resources has generally been taken within the framework of guidelines under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Many of the reports provide examples of policies and initiatives aimed at strengthening the role of women, and a number refer to the development of women's forestry organizations. Notable developments in the integration of local and indigenous communities have included the establishment of community-based management and ownership initiatives that are intended to generate income for local use and promote local responsibility for sustainable forest management. The importance of forest resources for the daily livelihoods of many people, and the need to safeguard rights of customary use, is also stressed in several reports.

9. Forest conservation and protection of unique types of forests and fragile ecosystems

15. Many countries have significant areas of ecologically important forest under some form of legal protection. Action has been taken to secure the effective conservation of these areas, for example, by addressing the potential conflicts that may arise in instances in which land is also important to the livelihoods of local populations. This has included consultation, at all stages of the process, on designation and on management plans, the offering of financial incentives and the use of partnership mechanisms. In national forest programmes and related biodiversity strategies increasing emphasis is given to conservation and the management of environmentally critical areas, although in several reports submitted by the least developed countries, the problem of resource constraints is stressed. ITTO is currently implementing 10 transboundary conservation projects that cover 10.3 million hectares of tropical forests, and ITTO and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) jointly organized an international workshop on increasing the effectiveness of transboundary conservation areas in tropical forests, held in Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand, in 2003.

10. Monitoring, assessment and reporting, and concepts, terminology and definitions

16. Many countries have well-established forest inventory systems that are being further developed to collect a wider range of data that relate not only to trees and wood production but also to ecological condition, biological diversity, tree health, fires, and use for recreation and non-timber forest products. While a number of developing countries report difficulties with monitoring, assessment and reporting, largely owing to a lack of expertise and funding, in its joint report CPF refers to the efforts of its members to help build capacity for national forest assessments. The joint CPF initiative on streamlining forest-related reporting aims to relieve the burden placed on countries by international bodies for forest-related reports. In addition, CPF is undertaking a joint initiative on the harmonization of forest-related terms and definitions.

11. Rehabilitation and conservation strategies for countries with low forest cover

17. Action taken in regard to rehabilitation and conservation includes afforestation programmes and the implementation of detailed operational guidelines aimed at conserving the protective functions of forests in areas of low forest cover. Further progress will depend upon the priority that is given to forest restoration in these countries. The Tehran process remains important: the joint CPF report explains that it provides a framework for cooperation and collaboration among its members in regard to low forest cover countries. Rehabilitation and conservation is being taken forward in certain regions by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and through the operational programme of the Global Environment Facility on sustainable land management.

12. Rehabilitation and restoration of degraded lands, and the promotion of natural and planted forests

18. Action taken by concerned countries in regard to degraded lands and the promotion of natural and planted forests includes forest restoration through natural regeneration, the establishment of plantations and the implementation of agroforestry projects. There are many examples of the successful establishment of plantations, which can take the pressure off natural forests without causing undesirable social or environmental side effects, provided that suitable land and the necessary financial and human resources for their effective establishment and maintenance are available. Innovative approaches have included working closely with communities to develop solutions, such as agroforestry systems, which can help meet future needs for wood and non-timber forest products within the context of broader livelihood requirements.

13. Maintaining forest cover to meet present and future needs

19. National forest programmes have become a vital tool for promoting dialogue with other sectors and increasing understanding of the benefits that forests bring. Highlighted in several reports is the importance of such programmes in developing national strategies that reflect the full range of forest values, including their contribution to the livelihoods of forest-dependent people. Emphasis is given to the role of cross-sectoral integration and the need for reliable data. While many countries have well-developed methods for forecasting long-term supply and demand trends, others are yet to carry out such assessments. In general, the existing mechanisms for assessing long-term trends are most sophisticated in those countries in which the problems are least acute. Noted in the reports is the need to take account of external factors, such as changing patterns of demand and the impact of substitutes, when assessing future needs. In addition, highlighted in some reports is the proactive work undertaken through wood promotion campaigns to stimulate demand for wood as a sustainably produced, renewable, raw material.

14. Financial resources

20. Members of CPF, such as FAO, ITTO and the World Bank, continue to mobilize financial resources for the sustainable management of forests. Information on sources of finance has been made available through the online *CPF Sourcebook on Funding for Sustainable Forest Management*. Several countries recognize the

need to provide an investment climate that is conducive to attracting funds, and some report on innovative approaches to financing sustainable forest management, including that of securing access to funds from the voluntary sector. A number of countries identify other responses to financial challenges, for example, through efficiency improvements and adopting low-input silviculture. In some reports, however, it is noted that poor financial returns from forests can threaten the capacity to manage them in regard to other benefits. It is clear from many reports that financing of sustainable forest management and payment for non-market output remain critical factors for achieving the successful implementation of IPF/IFF proposals. Furthermore, it is noted that, in future, access to official development assistance is likely to depend increasingly upon the identification of forest-related programmes as national priorities within broader national development plans.

15. International trade and sustainable forest management

21. Action taken to combat illegal trade has included the initiatives undertaken within the framework of the various forest law enforcement and governance processes. Recognized in the reports is the important role of the World Trade Organization and the continuing need for multilateral efforts to make trade and environment mutually supportive. Forest certification can help exporters to demonstrate that their forest products derive from sustainably managed sources and many countries report considerable progress in that regard, often associated with the development of national certification standards. Some countries have published guidelines on the public procurement of timber from sustainably managed forests.

16. International cooperation in capacity-building, and access to and transfer of environmentally sound technologies to support sustainable forest management

22. Numerous examples of bilateral and multilateral cooperation are cited in the reports, which also note the significant role of non-governmental organizations and of the partnerships established following the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In addition, it is made clear that, in particular in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, there is a continuing priority need to address issues of capacity-building and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies. While some donor countries still offer specific support for forest-related projects (sometimes within the context of the IPF/IFF proposals), there is a general move away from this approach. Increasingly, support for forest-related projects is likely to depend upon a clear demonstration of their benefits in terms of achieving broader development goals and contributing to objectives identified in poverty reduction strategy papers and similar national programmes.

III. Effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests: analysis of responses to the questionnaire

A. Overall assessment

23. In the present section, consideration is given to the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests in terms of its six principal functions and the 21 specific criteria that the Forum adopted, by resolution 2/3, for assessing the effectiveness of the arrangement. It draws upon the 22 responses received to the

questionnaire: 14 from countries, 1 from the European Union, a joint response from CPF, 5 from major groups and 1 from a forest-related process. The questionnaire invited an overall assessment of effectiveness in relation to each specific criterion; 17 of the 22 respondents (including the European Union) took the opportunity to provide an overall assessment for 1 or more criteria. These responses reveal that, while there is a range of views and it is difficult to draw firm conclusions given the relatively small number of responses, the most common assessment is "moderate". Details of the overall assessments for each specific criterion are given in the annex to the present report.

B. Remarks

24. The questionnaire invited remarks in relation to each specific criterion, an assessment according to the various activities⁷ of the international arrangement⁸ and suggestions for quantifiable benchmarks. Summarized below are the main points made under "remarks". An assessment according to activity is also noted where there appears to be a common view, among at least 6 respondents, that the effectiveness of a particular activity is other than "moderate". Ten respondents suggested benchmarks in respect of 1 or more of the specific criteria; these suggestions are recorded in the analytical study available on the Forum web site.

(a) Principal function: Implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action

Specific criterion (i): The extent to which countries, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and other actors have made progress in implementing the relevant IPF/IFF proposals for action

25. Countries explain that progress made in implementing IPF/IFF proposals for action is recorded in their national reports; section II above contains further details in that regard. CPF members state that they have made good progress in implementing the IPF/IFF proposals directed to them, and in assisting countries with their implementation. One major group points out that national forest programmes are a constructive tool for translating relevant IPF/IFF proposals to the national level. Other major groups consider that it is difficult to assess the contribution of the Forum to the progress made, and that progress is only partly reflected in official output.

Specific criterion (ii): The extent to which countries have developed and started to implement national forest programmes or equivalent processes

26. A large number of countries have national forest programmes or equivalent processes that take account of relevant IPF/IFF proposals. It is suggested that the existence of the international arrangement has contributed to this successful outcome by generating political commitment to national forest programmes. While financial constraints and lack of capacity have affected implementation in some reporting countries, the benefits of the support provided by CPF members is acknowledged. CPF members state that, increasingly, national forest programmes are seen as an effective tool for cross-sectoral and participatory policy-making and for translating international forest-related commitments into practice. Action by CPF members has included the National Forest Programme Facility, the work of PROFOR and capacity-building. A comment from one of the major groups is that

few national forest programmes take into account social aspects or aspects relating to trade, consumption and production patterns.

Specific criterion (iii): The extent to which participation of stakeholders in those programmes and processes has been enhanced

27. Countries report a positive trend towards increasing stakeholder participation, stimulated both by the emphasis in the IPF/IFF proposals and by more general national policies that promote such participation. The number of stakeholder groups has increased over time owing to an increased focus on the multiple values of forests. CPF members note that the general trend towards enhanced civil society participation in policy processes has gained momentum, although there are still variations in the extent to which all stakeholders are included. One major group refers to a recent review that revealed minimal participation by rightsholders, indigenous peoples, local communities and civil society organizations in a number of countries; others refer to the near-absence of women in policy-making roles in many countries and to the need for greater involvement of children or young people.

28. Five countries consider contacts made at Forum sessions to have been of limited effectiveness in respect of this criterion and one country considers them to have had no effect.

Specific criterion (iv): The extent to which the international arrangement on forests has facilitated and promoted countries' implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action, focusing on the means of implementation (finance, transfer of environmentally sound technologies and capacity-building) as well as the relevant common items

29. Countries identify finance, the transfer of environmentally sound technologies and capacity-building as a priority area for further action. While the work of the ad hoc expert group of the Forum and other relevant initiatives are recognized, the overall assessment of many is that their effectiveness has been limited in respect of this criterion. It is noted, however, that the international process has had some indirect effects on resource allocation: for example, financing by the European Union of forest-related rural development measures requires that the proposed action be consistent with national forest programmes. CPF members state that the Forum has facilitated dialogue on this subject and note that capacity-building is an integral and extensive part of their work. The importance of this issue, and the need for further action, is also highlighted by major groups.

Specific criterion (v): The extent to which countries have made progress in assessing the IPF/IFF proposals for action in order to determine their relevance in their national context

30. Some countries have commissioned systematic formal studies, while others explain that they have relied on more informal assessments (often undertaken within the context of preparing reports for the Forum and/or as part of the national forest programme process). While there is no agreed methodology for such assessments, some countries refer to the helpful framework provided as a result of a joint initiative between Australia and PROFOR. CPF members have also taken action to make the IPF/IFF proposals more readily understandable in national and regional

contexts. Major groups suggest that more effort is needed to communicate the outcomes of the international forest dialogue.

(b) Principal function: Forum for continued policy development and dialogue

Specific criterion (i): The extent to which the international arrangement on forests, including, inter alia, Forum sessions, intersessional work and the multi-stakeholder dialogue, and the related work of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and its members, as well as country- and organization-led initiatives, have enhanced forest policy development and dialogue

31. Several countries state that the global process has enhanced policy development and dialogue at the international level, and that it has also contributed to regional collaboration and helped to provide a conceptual framework for implementation at the national level. In addition, country-led initiatives have been valuable in moving beyond the implementation of existing commitments to promote dialogue on emerging issues. For the future, there is a need to involve those working on forest policy at the national level, including stakeholders, more fully in the work of the Forum. Some note that it is difficult to establish a direct link between the international arrangement and forest policy development, and suggest that a legally binding agreement would be more effective. CPF members note that country-led and organization-led initiatives have provided significant expert input and clarification to many complex issues. Major groups note that the work of the Forum has enhanced forest policy development, which has expanded well beyond traditional forestry policy issues, and that new ideas introduced at the Forum can be quickly transmitted to countries. There has been regular dialogue on such issues as gender-sensitive forestry development. It is suggested, however, that the dialogue should focus more clearly on implementation, and that more attention should be paid to critical social and rights issues.

Specific criterion (ii): The extent to which the international arrangement on forests has worked in a transparent and participatory manner, including through the involvement of major groups

32. Countries welcome the greater participation of major groups and the support that they have received from the secretariat. They also note that the Forum web site is good, and contributes to the participatory process. On the other hand, it is considered that accreditation to the Economic and Social Council remains a constraint. In addition, further work is required to promote effective dialogue in plenary sessions and to provide opportunities for participation by a wider range of stakeholders. CPF members state that the multi-stakeholder dialogue at sessions of the Forum and the participation of civil society in intersessional activities have been beneficial. The informal CPF Network has also provided a useful platform for engaging and informing stakeholders. Major groups also refer to the institutional constraints and argue that they should be more closely involved in key discussions leading to decisions.

33. Seven respondents (five countries, the European Union and one major group) consider ad hoc expert groups to have been of limited effectiveness in respect of this criterion.

Specific criterion (iii): The extent to which the Collaborative Partnership on Forests members have responded to the guidance of the Forum

34. Countries confirm that CPF members are addressing priority issues identified by the Forum, but point out that its members are constrained by the mandates given by their governing bodies and the limited resources available for collaborative action. In the future, more consistent political guidance is needed to make full use of the potential of CPF. CPF members also note that the Partnership is made up of individual members, each with its own mandate, priorities and limited budget. CPF has encouraged Governments to send consistent messages. CPF members have or are in the process of implementing most invitations extended by the Forum, and details are provided in CPF progress reports. One major group commented on the usefulness of the CPF web site for those with access to computers.

Specific criterion (iv): The extent to which progress has been made in reaching a common understanding of forest-related concepts, terminology and definitions

35. Countries state that particular progress has been made in regard to criteria and indicators, with the Forum, at its fourth session, acknowledging 7 thematic elements of sustainable forest management. Appreciation is expressed for initiatives taken by CPF members to organize expert meetings, but it is considered that further discussions are needed on some issues relating to concepts, terminology and definitions: examples include the forest-related definitions used by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and clarification of how the ecosystem approach relates to sustainable forest management. CPF members confirm that their technical work has gone a long way towards fostering a common understanding of forest-related concepts, terms and definitions, but that further work is needed in some areas. Major groups also note that progress has been made, but suggest that further clarification of social aspects is needed.

(c) Principal function: Cooperation and policy and programme coordination

Specific criterion (i): The extent to which partnerships relevant to the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action have been advanced

36. Countries note the progress made by regional partnerships and the benefits that their dynamism has brought to national policy development. CPF is recognized as an important partnership. There are also several major forest-related partnerships that originate from other processes, such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development. CPF members stress the value of their engagement in a wide range of partnerships for the implementation of international commitments and agreements. One major group highlights the initiative led by indigenous peoples concerning traditional forest-related knowledge as an example of a partnership resulting from the Forum; another suggests that a new partnership could be formed to raise the profile of international forest politics in higher education.

Specific criterion (ii): The extent to which the international arrangement on forests has facilitated and promoted coordination and cooperation among other forest-related organizations, instruments and processes

37. Countries state that the Forum has increased the visibility of forest-related issues at the international level, and that CPF has played a key role in promoting

coordination and cooperation. For the future, the definition of global goals could help provide more direction. It is noted that coordination and cooperation would be strengthened if there were a legally binding agreement on forests. CPF members note that the Partnership has embarked on a number of joint initiatives and other collaborative activities; such activities have also helped to foster synergies and trust among CPF members. Major groups stress the value of the multi-stakeholder dialogue in promoting cooperation and consensus.

(d) Principal function: International cooperation

Specific criterion (i): The extent to which the international community, including bilateral and multilateral donors and organizations, Collaborative Partnership on Forests members and international and regional processes, have facilitated the implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, inter alia, through the provision of financial, technical and scientific resources and capacity-building

38. Countries point out that a number of donor countries have supported national forest programme processes and other programmes that implement IPF/IFF proposals through bilateral or multilateral cooperation. There is, however, a need to emphasize the linkages between national forest programmes and the broader planning processes which determine overall priorities for development cooperation. It is noted that, while the international arrangement has no implementation mechanism, the provision of financial, technical and scientific resources and capacity-building is critical for progress to be made towards achieving the goal of sustainable forest management. CPF members refer to the direct technical assistance and/or scientific advice that they provide.

Specific criterion (ii): The extent to which the international arrangement on forests has promoted efforts by the international community to facilitate the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action through, in particular, North-South cooperation and public-private partnerships, as well as through South-South and North-North cooperation

39. Countries state that the National Forest Programme Facility aims to foster South-South cooperation and that regional intersessional activities are necessary given the differing conditions among regions. Reference is also made to the important role of the private sector and civil society. CPF members state that the international arrangement has supported many efforts to implement sustainable forest management, but note that increasing calls from the Forum for further action are overwhelming implementing agencies at all levels, especially in developing countries.

(e) Principal function: Monitoring and assessing progress through reporting

Specific criterion (i): The extent to which countries, regions, organizations and processes respond to the call from Forum and Collaborative Partnership on Forests members for voluntary reports, with a focus on the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action

40. Countries note that many countries have not provided voluntary national reports. The number of reports has, however, increased, and the reports provide a

useful documentary account of the progress made in implementing IPF/IFF proposals. It is suggested that more countries would submit reports if the reporting framework were simplified, and greater use were made of them. CPF members refer to the annual progress reports that they provide through the CPF Framework and to their work on streamlining forest-related reporting. Major groups note that some forested countries have not submitted voluntary reports and suggest that reports should focus on obstacles to effective implementation.

41. Five respondents (four countries and one major group) consider contacts made at Forum sessions to have been of limited effectiveness in respect of this criterion, and one country considers them to have had no effect.

Specific criterion (ii): The extent to which trends, lessons learned, emerging issues and actions are identified and become apparent through those voluntary reports

42. Some countries suggest that emerging issues may be identified more readily in other ways, for example, by research organizations or through discussion by think tanks. CPF members state that country reports are increasingly describing trends and lessons learned. While one major group states that reports provide useful geographically specific information, another states that few reports cover trends, lessons learned and emerging issues.

Specific criterion (iii): The extent to which major groups have been encouraged to participate in developing voluntary reports

43. Although some countries have invited major groups to comment on national reports, many state that effectiveness has been limited in respect of this criterion. In some countries, the process of stakeholder dialogue is relatively new and still evolving. CPF members encourage major groups to participate in voluntary national reporting. One major group states that fewer than one half of the reports submitted were developed in consultation with stakeholders and that, even when consulted, the views of stakeholders are not always reflected in the final report. In particular, there is a need for greater involvement of indigenous peoples.

Specific criterion (iv): The extent to which Collaborative Partnership on Forests members have worked to strengthen countries' abilities to monitor, assess and report progress in the implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action

44. Countries note that the work carried out by the CPF task force on streamlining forest-related reporting is promising. CPF members highlight their support for country-led and organization-led initiatives on monitoring, assessment and reporting. Capacity-building for the collection, analysis and dissemination of information on sustainable forest management is a key component of the work of FAO and ITTO.

Specific criterion (v): The extent to which Forum sessions provide opportunities to voluntarily report progress and lessons learned

45. Countries note that opportunities are provided through discussions of the themes of the Forum sessions, multi-stakeholder dialogues, panel discussions and side events, but there should be a more interactive discussion held during plenary sessions and a greater involvement of those actively engaged in implementation at

the national level. CPF members comment that dialogue can be particularly effective and lead to innovative solutions when held by small groups and/or at the regional or subregional level. One major group states that Forum sessions have provided the opportunity to present the perspectives of women and initiatives that have positive outcomes for women.

Specific criterion (vi): The extent to which countries make progress in monitoring, assessment and reporting through, *inter alia*, applying criteria and indicator processes or similar tools in their efforts to achieve sustainable forest management

46. Countries state that the development of criteria and indicators (and the identification of 7 common thematic elements at the global level) is a successful aspect of the international arrangement. It is considered that the next challenge is to apply criteria and indicators in a systematic way at the national level. CFI members are working to broaden understanding of criteria and indicators and to encourage their use as a monitoring and reporting tool in national forest programmes and other frameworks, such as those relating to biodiversity.

(f) Principal function: Strengthening political commitment

Specific criterion (i): The extent to which high-level engagement furthers political commitment to the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action by countries

47. Countries state that high-level engagement helps to increase commitment to and awareness of the IPF/IFF proposals and has been a key element in implementation at the national level. It is suggested that effective political engagement will benefit from messages simpler than those contained in the IPF/IFF proposals and that tangible goals will help to raise political commitment and improve communication. The need to underline the importance of a cross-sectoral approach to forestry is also stressed. Some point out, however, that deforestation and forest degradation continue to occur and that an effective legally binding agreement will improve international governance of forests. CPF members state that strengthened high-level political commitment will support the efforts of countries. One major group links limited progress to inadequate political commitment. Another states that, through their participation at Forum sessions, some Governments have pledged action to further the involvement of women in forest-related activities and organizations.

Specific criterion (ii): The extent to which the international arrangement on forests succeeds in enhancing the positioning of forests on the international agenda

48. Countries point out that, without the international arrangement, there would be no international body dealing with forest issues in an encompassing way at the global level. Specific reference is made to the ministerial message to the World Summit on Sustainable Development.⁹ Some suggest, however, that success has been limited and that there is a perception that legally binding conventions have greater weight. CPF members state that, while forest-related issues are on the international agenda, there are also many other pressing concerns; there is a need to reaffirm commitment to sustainable forest management, build stronger linkages

between forests and internationally agreed development goals and strengthen the international arrangement. One major group states that the issue of forests is lower on the political agenda than it was 5 or 10 years ago. Another states that the success of the international arrangement depends upon its success in relating forests to wider social and political issues.

IV. Conclusions

49. Reports and/or responses to the questionnaire were received from 46 countries, from the European Union, from 10 other relevant organizations and forest-related processes and, jointly, from CPF members. While care must be taken to recognize this limited sample when drawing conclusions, the reports nevertheless provide valuable information on a cross-section of experience relating to the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action. They suggest that greatest progress has been made in relation to the development and implementation of national forest programmes, or similar frameworks; in extending stakeholder participation; and in the development of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. Highlighted in the reports are areas in which there is scope for further effort to be made. It is clear that, in many parts of the world, there are still serious challenges to be met, in particular in terms of combating deforestation and addressing the problems associated with illegal forest activities. Moreover, the countries that struggle most to secure adequate means of implementation are often those which face the severest challenges in pursuing sustainable forest management, with a complex interaction of difficult social, economic and environmental factors. There is also a need to recognize the often crucial impact on forests of other policies and economic pressures (e.g., those relating to trade, agriculture, energy and development of human settlements). A fundamental challenge for the future is to ensure that society places a proper value on forests, reflecting their non-market, public good outputs, as well as financial returns. Other priorities identified in the reports include the need to develop effective institutional frameworks, with good governance; to safeguard the rights of people whose daily livelihoods depend upon forests; and to establish stronger cross-sectoral links with other areas of national policy processes, such as poverty reduction strategy papers.

50. The responses to the questionnaire suggest that the international arrangement has done a good deal of useful work, against a background of many competing priorities on the international agenda, but that the full potential of the international arrangement on forests is yet to be realized. Views are also expressed about the benefit of a legally binding instrument, in terms of raising the status of forest-related issues on the international agenda.

51. The review suggests that the original mandate of the international arrangement remains valid, but that there is a need to strengthen the arrangement. Recurrent themes in the reports and the responses to the questionnaire include the need to:

- (a) Secure political commitment. To achieve this, it must be clear to decision makers, and to the people they represent, why sustainable forest

management is relevant to the broader global agenda (including the agenda set out in the Millennium Declaration);

(b) Strengthen the horizontal cross-sectoral linkages between the forest sector and other sectors at the global, regional, national and local levels. This will require: analysis and networking to develop linkages between forest policies and wider social, economic and environmental policies; looking ahead to identify and examine emerging issues; and making better use of the position of the United Nations Forum on Forests to contribute to debates taking place in other international forums;

(c) Strengthen the vertical linkages between forest policy development and dialogue at the global, regional, national and local levels. This will help in the identification of emerging issues and also help to ensure a more rapid transfer of knowledge and experience. Well-thought-out country-led initiatives and regional meetings can be particularly valuable in this respect;

(d) Create a stronger enabling environment for the implementation of forest policies. This depends on securing political commitment and requires that more emphasis be placed on the means of implementation (finance, transfer of environmentally sound technologies and capacity-building);

(e) Build upon the potential of CPE. The Partnership is widely recognized for its important role in promoting coordination and cooperation in support of sustainable forest management among a large number of forest-related international organizations and processes;

(f) Improve monitoring, assessment and reporting through processes that are perceived as worthwhile and relevant to the needs of countries. Criteria and indicators (and the 7 thematic elements of sustainable forest management) can provide a sound framework, provided that countries have the capacity to collate the necessary information.

52. These conclusions do not point to a need to change the institutional status of the Forum as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council with universal membership, or to make any dramatic changes to the objective, purpose and functions of the international arrangement, as set out in Council resolution 2000/35. Such changes could be time-consuming, without offering significant benefits. On the other hand, the international arrangement on forests is still evolving and the review suggests that its effectiveness and efficiency would be significantly enhanced by making changes in its working methods. Furthermore, the review has indicated that there is a need to consider further options for strengthening the arrangement — including the consideration of financing of sustainable forest management — that go beyond changes to working methods.

53. Further options for strengthening the arrangement and its mandate for the future are considered in the reports of the Secretary-General on the review of progress and consideration of future actions and on the consideration of the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests. Meanwhile, possible changes in working methods, for consideration by the Forum, might include the following:

(a) Secure political commitment by conveying a simpler message about the relevance of sustainable forest management to the broader global agenda, possibly by including a global goal, and by ensuring greater continuity in the work of the Forum by making provision for the re-election of Bureau members for a second or third year;

(b) Strengthen horizontal cross-sectoral linkages by developing closer working relationships with other instruments, conventions and processes whose decisions have an impact on the world's forests, and by scheduling the Forum's consideration of major themes in a way that allows the outcomes of the discussions to contribute effectively to the work of other bodies, such as the Economic and Social Council;

(c) Strengthen vertical linkages between forest policy development and dialogue at the global, regional, national and local levels by reviewing the scheduling and cycle of meetings and perhaps by holding regional and global thematic meetings on major forest-related issues in alternate years;

(d) Create a stronger enabling environment for the implementation of forest policies by establishing new financial mechanisms for financing sustainable forest management activities and projects;

(e) Build upon the potential of CPF by inviting Governments to send consistent messages through the governing bodies of CPF members about the importance of collaborative work to promote sustainable forest management;

(f) Improve monitoring, assessment and reporting by continuing work on streamlining and capacity-building and by developing a clearer articulation of how the framework provided by the 7 thematic elements acknowledged at the fourth session of the Forum can help in assessing the progress made towards sustainable forest management;

(g) Strengthen the secretariat to reflect decisions about future working methods and the consideration of future actions, so that it can continue to provide efficient and effective service to the Forum;

(h) Following the consideration of the above-mentioned reports of the Secretary-General, there may also be a need to consider holding an organizational session prior to the sixth session of the Forum in order to agree on the scheduling of work and to develop a new multi-year programme of work for the strengthened international arrangement on forests.

V. Points for discussion

54. Bearing in mind the other discussions that will be held during its fifth session, on the review of progress and consideration of future actions and on the consideration of the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests, the United Nations Forum on Forests may wish to:

(a) Receive additional input from member States and other relevant organizations on the implementation of the IPF/IFF proposals for action and on the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests;

(b) Recommend, in the light of its review of the effectiveness of the international arrangement on forests, that the current institutional status of the Forum as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council with universal membership be maintained, and to reaffirm that the objective, purpose and functions of the international arrangement, as set out in Council resolution 2000/35, remain valid;

(c) Consider the changes to its working methods outlined in paragraph 53 above;

(d) Use the outcome of the present review as a basis for responding to the request of the General Assembly (see para. 4 above) that each functional commission of the Economic and Social Council report on its methods of work, in order better to pursue the implementation of the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits;

(e) Consider the need for further review of the international arrangement, in order that it continue to be dynamic and adapt to evolving conditions, and consider ways of helping member States to participate actively in such a review.

Notes

¹ The members of CPF are: Center for International Forestry Research; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; International Tropical Timber Organization; International Union of Forestry Research Organizations; United Nations Development Programme; United Nations Environment Programme; World Agroforestry Centre; World Bank; World Conservation Union; and the secretariats of the Convention on Biological Diversity; the Global Environment Facility; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, and the United Nations Forum on Forests.

² See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 22 (E/2002/42)*, chap. II, sect. B.

³ See *ibid.*, 2004, *Supplement No. 22 (E/2004/42 and Corr.1)*, chap. I, sect. B.

⁴ An unofficial working draft of an analytical study, which contains a more detailed analysis of the reports and responses, is available for information, in English only, on the Forum's web site (<http://www.un.org/esa/forests/>). Individual reports and responses are also available on the web site.

⁵ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2001, Supplement No. 22 (E/2001/42/Rev.1)*, part two, chap. I, sect. B, resolution 1/1.

⁶ The guidelines and a suggested format for national reports (see para. 2 above) list the thematic issues discussed at previous sessions of the Forum and provide cross-references to the proposals for action.

⁷ More details about the activities of CPF members in relation to this thematic element, and others, are available in the CPF frameworks, submitted to the Forum as information papers.

⁸ The questionnaire identified a number of activities of the international arrangement, including "contacts made at Forum sessions" and "ad hoc expert groups". Further details are available in the notes on the voluntary questionnaire and in the individual responses to it, available on the Forum web site.

⁹ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2002, Supplement No. 22 (E/2002/42)*, chap. II, sect. B, resolution 2/1.

Annex

Responses to the questionnaire: overall assessment of the effectiveness of international arrangement on forests

Specific criterion	Responses from member States and the European Union (EU) ^a				Responses from representatives of major groups ^b				
	None	Limited	Moderate	High	None	Limited	Moderate	High	
(a) Principal function: Implementation of IPF/IFF proposals for action									
(i)		4+EU	9	1		1	2		
(ii)		6	3+EU	4			1	1	
(iii)		3	6+EU	2		1		2	
(iv)		8+EU	3	1		1			
(v)	2	1	5+EU	3		1			
(b) Principal function: Forum for continued policy development and dialogue									
(i)		4	4+EU	5		1		2	
(ii)		1+EU	7	3		1	1	1	
(iii)		4	3	2+EU		1			
(iv)		4+EU	3	6		1		1	
(c) Principal function: Cooperation and policy and programme coordination									
(i)		6+EU	4	3		1			
(ii)		3+EU	4	4		1		1	
(d) Principal function: International cooperation									
(i)		3	4+EU	3		1	1		
(ii)		3+EU	6	2					
(e) Principal function: Monitoring and assessing progress through reporting									
(i)		7	2+EU	2		2			
(ii)		4	4+EU	1		2			
(iii)		9+EU	1	1		1	1		
(iv)		3	5	1		1			
(v)		4+EU	4	2		1			
(vi)		3	8+EU	2		1			
(f) Principal function: Strengthening political commitment									
(i)		1	4+EU	5	1		1		
(ii)			9+EU	1	1			1	

^a Some countries stated that effectiveness was, for example, both moderate and high for a particular criterion; in such cases, both assessments are recorded.

^b Confederation of European Forest Owners, FERN/Forest Peoples' Programme, and workers and trade unions.